

Two Cities Envision a Sustainable Future Together

Ranson and Charles Town are fighting the effects of manufacturing closures, as well as increasing growth pressures from the Baltimore-Washington metropolitan area. In the past several years, Ranson has lost more than 1,500 jobs as manufacturers shut down, leaving the community with contaminated, vacant sites and a downtown in economic decline. At the same time, Jefferson County's population has been growing steadily, but with few strategies to guide the growth. Joining forces with federal and state agencies, Ranson and Charles Town have developed a plan for revitalization. The Partnership for Sustainable Communities has been a key player in moving that plan forward.

The Power of Partnership

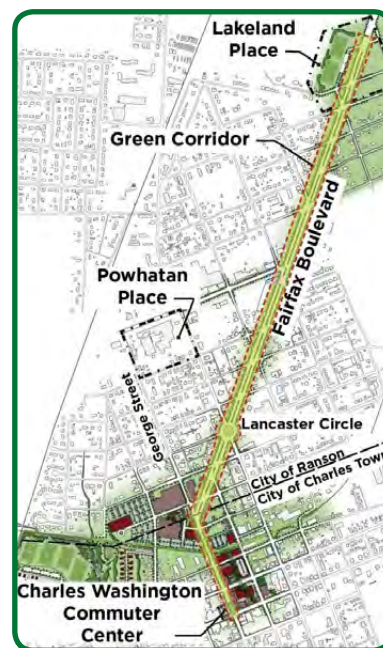
The Partnership initially helped the two cities implement recommendations from [EPA brownfields assessment grants](#) awarded in 2001, 2004, and 2006. These grants paved the way for American Public University's construction of an academic center—the first LEED-certified¹ commercial building in West Virginia—on a former brownfield. The university is also transforming a shuttered manufacturing facility into a LEED-certified office building. [According to Ranson's city manager, Andy Blake](#), the university's investment will attract hundreds of jobs.

"If not for the work done through the brownfields grants, we would have been forced to look outside the city limits for land parcels large enough to expand our campus," says Wallace Boston, president and CEO of the American Public University System. "Instead, we have been able to compound our commitment to sustainability by reclaiming sites and reducing the impact to the surrounding countryside."

To build on this momentum, Ranson and Charles Town applied for and received an [EPA Brownfields Area-Wide Planning Grant](#), a [HUD Community](#)



Challenge Planning Grant, and a DOT TIGER II Planning Grant in 2010. With these funds, the two cities began envisioning a sustainable future. Coordination of the three grants allowed the communities to develop a cohesive plan that uses vacant, previously contaminated land for economic development, links transportation to land use, protects the environment, and provides more affordable housing.



The Green Corridor will surround Fairfax Boulevard, making it easier for people to walk or bike to jobs and community facilities in both towns. Learn more at www.ransonrenewed.com. Image courtesy of the city of Ranson.

The city of Ranson received technical assistance through [EPA's Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities Program](#) to strengthen and articulate the plan. EPA worked with elected officials, stakeholders, and the public to identify areas for growth and analyze existing community tools. This assistance, provided in May 2011, resulted in a

¹ LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification provides third-party verification that a building, home, or community was designed and built using strategies to achieve high performance in sustainable site development, water savings, energy efficiency, materials selection, and indoor environmental quality. From the U.S. Green Building Council, www.usgbc.org.

clear and specific action plan that helped Ranson implement the three grants ahead of schedule.

The plan centers on transforming Fairfax Boulevard, the main thoroughfare between the two cities.

A “green corridor” will surround the boulevard, providing a walkable, bikeable connection between the two cities that provides access to regional job centers and community facilities. Ranson and Charles Town are using the TIGER II grant, with a local match, to redesign the road to become a “complete street” designed to be safe for drivers, bicyclists, and pedestrians. These funds will also help transform a rundown historic building into a regional commuter center in downtown Charles Town, providing residents and workers with access to regional trains and buses.

In April 2012, Ranson’s city council unanimously approved proposals to enact a new zoning code and comprehensive plan, moving the community one step closer to realizing its vision for growth. With the Community Challenge Grant and Building Blocks technical assistance, the city drafted new zoning requirements to develop streets that are safe and comfortable for pedestrians, bicyclists,

and motorized vehicles; bring buildings closer to the street; allow a mix of uses; and accommodate affordable homes. With the Brownfields Area-Wide Planning Grant, the city created a downtown plan that will develop six cleaned-up brownfields and spur the local economy. Ranson also plans to use a [HUD Brownfields Economic Development Initiative Grant](#) and [Section 108 loan](#) to clean up a former foundry. The site will be redeveloped as Powhatan Place, a mixed-use, LEED-certified development that will include a variety of housing types, stores, and recreation areas, as well as green infrastructure² to manage stormwater runoff.

This case study appears in *Three Years of Helping Communities Achieve Their Visions for Growth and Prosperity*, a report of the Partnership for Sustainable Communities, June 2012. Learn more about the Partnership at www.sustainablecommunities.gov.

² [Green infrastructure](#) strategies use vegetation, soils, and permeable pavement in settings like rain gardens, parking lots, and along streets to mimic natural processes by capturing, slowing, and filtering rainfall and stormwater runoff.

